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UNCLAS RANGOON 001375

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SUBJECT: UNHCR CAUTIOUS OF SPDC CHANGES

REF: A. RANGOON 1372 AND PREVIOUS

[B](#). RANGOON 1136 AND PREVIOUS

[C](#). STATE 184298

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: UNHCR officials took the opportunity of a senior-level visit to Burma to stress that the time was not right for repatriation of Burmese refugees from Thailand. However, they said that roving missions and assessments in the eastern border regions were very important and would continue. UNHCR is waiting to see if there will be any impact of the SPDC's power shift on UNHCR's nascent efforts in the East. End summary.

UNHCR Visitors Not Encouraging Repatriation

[1](#)2. (U) UNHCR Assistant High Commissioner Kamel Morjane and UNHCR Director for Asia and the Pacific Janet Lim visited Burma from October 18-21 to assess UNHCR's longstanding operations in northern Rakhine State and some tentative new operations along the eastern border with Thailand. The two officials traveled to Tanintharyi Division (near the Thai border), met with GOB interlocutors and a dozen partner NGOs, and briefed the Chief of Mission and other Rangoon diplomats on October 20.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Mr. Morjane stressed repeatedly that despite the agency's expansion into eastern Burma (pursuant to a February agreement with recently ousted PM Khin Nyunt; ref B) UNHCR was not encouraging the return to Burma of some or all of the estimated 133,000 refugees in Thailand. He said that surveys by UNHCR's local staff, and his own trip, reinforced the fact that the region was not ready socio-economically and the logistical infrastructure was not in place for the return of "even 1,000" refugees. The Chief of Mission noted these were crucial topics to explain clearly to donors, and lauded local UNHCR staff for getting the message across well over the last several months.

[1](#)4. (SBU) Mr. Morjane said, however, that it was important for UNHCR to continue its "roving missions" to Karen and Mon States and Tanintharyi Division to provide some basic assistance and prepare a more in-depth assessment of the region should the political conditions for return improve suddenly. He indicated that UNHCR's NGO implementing partners, after a "frank exchange of views," urged the UN agency to continue its activities in Rakhine State and in the eastern border area.

Worrisome Changes?

[1](#)5. (SBU) Mr. Morjane did express some concern regarding the recent power shift in the SPDC, which saw the ouster of former Prime Minister General Khin Nyunt (ref A). Because the UNHCR's access to the Thai border regions is based on an accord signed with Khin Nyunt, there is some uncertainty whether the agreement will outlive his prime ministership. Mr. Morjane said UNHCR intended to lie low for the moment and not press the issue.
Martinez